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MR. ROBERT ROMAINE'S EVIDENCE

BEFORE THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND COLONIZATION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, CANADA,

In relation to a System of Tramways for Colonization Roads, and the laying out of Villages and Towns, in the North West Territories.

MR. ROBERT ROMAINE, of the House of Commons, Ottawa, was next examined.

By the Chairman :

Q. You were before the Committee last year, and you gave them some information in regard to a new scheme or system of colonization for the North-West, by a plan of laying out continuous villages along and at each side of the Canadian Pacific Railway, or any branch lines. Would you please state in what manner this system of colonization is to be carried out?—The system of colonization could easily be effected by devoting the one mile belt of land at each side of the Canadian Pacific Railway, or any branch or main line of railway, for the purpose of establishing villages and market towns, and where circumstances would eventually warrant, the establishment of cities would naturally follow.

Q. The mile belt reserve, as you are aware, has lately been thrown open to settlement?—Yes; I am aware of that; but there is not very much of it taken up yet. However, I submitted this scheme to the Canadian Pacific Railway two years since.

Q. Will you state in what manner you would lay out these villages?—The villages would be surveyed out into lots of say 50 yards front by 200 deep, or about two acres each. This square mile would then give one lot to at least 250 farmers of 160 acres each, or a four acre lot to 125 farmers of 320 acres. The balance would be ample to be appropriated to street allowances, market square, public buildings, &c., and would also accommodate the commercial, mechanical and labouring classes with sufficient building lots for their residences, &c.

Q. You would make your villages, then, to contain about from 250 to 300 inhabitants at the utmost?—Yes; of course a man owning a square mile would get a proportionately larger quantity of land in the village. He would have to have labourers and others working for him, who would require extra accommodation.

By Mr. Trow :

Q. You would group them together as they are found in Germany and in some parts of France, in farm villages?—Yes; it would be more in accordance with Continental European life.

Q. Would you propose to have the barns and other buildings, that are usually placed upon farms, grouped together in these villages?—I would have all buildings necessary for the purpose of housing and keeping cattle in the village, but store buildings could be kept out on the farm. For dairy purposes this grouping system would be excellent, as it would also be for cattle feeding.

Q. The outhouses would be on the respective farms, and the dwellings would be in the village?—The outhouses for feeding purposes would be in the villages. Each farmer would have two or four acres, according to the size of his farm.

By the Chairman:

Q. If all the farmers are to live in these villages, what means would be given them to reach their farms?—The farmers would reach and travel to and from their farms by means of tramways worked by steam, reaching a distance of from 50 to 70 miles at each side of, and at right angles to, the line of railway. The tramways would be built on the road or concession lines, say 4 miles apart, endeavoring always to have one tramway to each station on the line, which I understand are situated a distance averaging 8 miles apart on the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Q. To whom do you propose these tramways should belong, and by whom should they be worked and controlled?—These tramways should and ought to be owned by the county or town municipality, as any macadamized or plank road would be; the first cost, keeping in repair and expense of running the same, would have to be borne by assessment on the land in a similar manner to that of roads, bridges, &c., now are in Ontario. As to who should work and control them I am not exactly prepared to answer definitely, as there are several circumstances to be taken into consideration. No doubt a workable scheme could be devised. For instance, if the capital to build these tramways is to be raised by debentures on the credit of the County Councils, the interest with sinking fund might be guaranteed by the several Provincial Governments, and I think in that case Commissioners appointed by the latter should have complete control, and say what assessment should be levied for repairs, working expenses, &c.

By Mr. Trow:

Q. Have you any idea of the probable cost of this system of tramways per township of 6 miles square?—The roads would be laid out 4 miles apart through the county, and I reckon the average cost would be about $2,500 per mile, so that the cost per township can be easily estimated.

By the Chairman:

Q. When you speak of tramways, do you propose a wooden or an iron rail?—An iron rail, and I estimate the cost at $2,500 per mile. Of course much would depend on the state of the iron market, &c.

By Mr. Trow:

Q. Would that include rolling stock?—No; but of course the cars would not be very expensive; they would merely be open cars, and not of very heavy construction.

Q. Would that not have a tendency to do away with horses?—Yes; very much.

By the Chairman:

Q. Do you propose that farmers should pay for the village lots, and are the lots liable to be sold for taxes or other debts?—No; the farmers do not pay for their village lots; they possess the lots on sufferance only, and on the condition that they are the owners or tenants of the farms they are cultivating. When a farmer sells his farm he will also be obliged to sell any improvements on the village lot, or if he even rents his farm, then the tenant who works and cultivates the farm will have the right to live on and possess the village lot. As to liability for taxes and other debts whatever, there should be legislation exempting both the village lot and all the immovable property thereon from distress by law. At the same time, there should be no compulsion for a farmer to live on a village lot if he preferred to live on his farm or elsewhere.

Q. Do you not think that farmers in general prefer living on their farms, instead of in a village?—No; I think the great majority, especially farmers with young families, would prefer living in the village, because the present system of locating the residence of farmers so far apart on their farms, very often in-out-of-the-way places, removed long distances both from the schoolhouse and place of worship, is a great drawback to education and civilization. By this new system of congregating them in the same town or village, and that town being the established market town, sociability and cordiality among the farmers and their families would be greatly fostered by the close proximity of their residences and the available intercourse so obtained. Besides being, especially in winter, close at hand to the butcher, grocer, dry goods merchant, and in case of sickness being near the doctor, would be a great benefit in every respect.

Q. What other benefits do you think the farmers would derive in case your system was adopted?—Well, I think, that by so congregating together in the manner mentioned, a community of farmers and their families—who otherwise would be scattered over an area of several townships—would by this new system be alongside of, and quite near to, a main line of speedy communication with some large city, so that all the religious, educational, temporal, social and intellectual benefits possessed by that city, could be readily enjoyed and obtained by that village or town, if thought desirable.

By Mr. Trow:

Q. Would there not be considerable risk from fire taking place where the farm buildings would be so close together?—The buildings would always be two acres apart, from centre to centre.

Q. Would you not have buildings for the storage of grain out on the farm?—Yes.

Q. Well, I have reference to those buildings?—Of course there would be some risk.

By Mr. Cochrane:

Q. You would house the cattle in the villages, and of course you would have to draw all the fodder in to them. How do you propose to take your manure out?—You can draw from ten to fifteen tons of manure on a tramway of this kind as easily as you can draw a much less quantity a shorter distance on a waggon. In England they now draw manure ten or fifteen miles on the cars, and this is quite a common custom.

Q. But it would have to be taken off the cars and distributed by teams and waggons, and this would be handling the manure three times?—Yes; but now they are beginning to use a system of green manuring more than anything else. You can do more with green manure than with stable manure. But of course you would have to make some use of the manure made in the stable, which is always improved by being turned over two or three times.

By the Chairman:

Q. You said something last year about the benefit the Government would derive by adopting your system of villages and towns?—Yes; for instance, take the regular postal service to villages and towns lying some distance from the line of railway. It is very expensive to forward mails by stages, besides the trouble and inconvenience of making up weekly, semi-weekly, tri-weekly and daily mails. It would also facilitate country labourers and others depositing their earnings in the Post Office Savings Banks. It would assist the movements of the Militia and Constabulary for sudden emergencies; the bringing and summoning Witnesses and Jurors from a distance in attending the Assizes, and the whole administration of justice in general, all along the line. The telegraph and telephone service would be more concentrated and facilitated. All the county and other public buildings being located close to each other in every town on the line, the municipal business of the county, as well as the townships, would be greatly facilitated. In fact wherever the system could be adopted and carried out, incalculable benefits would annually ensue to the whole country at large.

Q. What saving in carting to and from the farm to the railway station do you think would be gained?—I have no hesitation in saying that a saving of ten to one would be gained by the tramway system over the carting done by horses. At present the produce of the country has to be carted from all points of the compass to a large town or city market as a centre, incurring a great deal of useless and extra mileage of cartage. By this new system every station on the line must, and would be, a far larger and more extensive market for wheat and other produce. Take, for instance, six townships in length at each side of the railway, and one and a-half townships in breadth (nine miles), fronting on the line of railway—about the general distance between two stations—making an area of country drained of its produce 324 square miles at each side, or 648 square miles for both sides of the railway, and there is no valid reason why the tramways and this system should not extend for fifty or sixty miles at each side, if the country will admit of it. The railway company would

find it easier also to load, as the elevators are placed quite close to the sidings at each side of the station, and in delivering and receiving goods and merchandise, the tramways on the several avenues, and also those on the concession roads, could be made use of by them if they thought fit, and car loads could be taken almost to and from the very doors of the merchant or shop-keeper, as well as machinery to and from the machine shop, the gauge of both tracks being the same.

Q. Do you not think that these tramways would do away with the necessity of building so many branch lines of railway?—I feel certain that they would, to a very large extent. I dare say you will remember, only but a few years since, when Illinois and other Western States began to be settled. The great outcry there was to get railroads to bring the farm produce to market. Now they have plenty of railroads, and if you examine a map of northern Illinois especially, you will find that you can hardly strike a straight line for a distance of twenty miles in any direction without touching a line of railway. Still, that does not mean that a farmer there has not to travel more than twenty miles to reach a station, and it is a demonstrated fact that wheat cannot be grown and carted twenty miles profitably. I feel certain, after reading the complaints of the farmers of our own North-West, that a great deal is attributable to the want of good tramways, not only to within twenty miles of their farms and residences, but to their very farms, or within, at least, to an average mile of them, as this system proposes to do. I therefore repeat that this new system of laying out concession line tramways in connection with permanent markets, would prevent, to a very large extent, the necessity of expending both capital and labour in building competing lines of railway, some of them running almost parallel and close to one another, with all their additional staff of officers, stations, &c. The already existing main lines would then find it to their advantage to lay down additional tracks to do their work.

By Mr. Allison (Lennox):

Q. What would be the motive power for your tramways—horses or steam?—You can use horse-power if you like, but steam-power is what this system proposes to employ. In reference to what I have just said about railway lines intercepting each other in all directions, if you will take a map of the North-West you will see that a line of railway branches off from the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway and runs at an angle in the direction of the Saskatchewan. Now, those two lines should be parallel, located a suitable distance apart and fed by tramways running to them at right angles. If you had a map of northern Illinois, you would see that you could scarcely draw a straight line twenty miles long without cutting across some line of railway. Instead of that, they should run parallel, about 100 miles apart.

By the Chairman:

Q. In making your estimate of the cost of these tramways, have you taken into consideration the physical difficulties of the country, or do you estimate for a flat, prairie country?—I estimate for a prairie country. There is no necessity for grading,

as a rule; nine-tenths of the road could be laid on the grass. Of course there would be little mounds here and there that would have to be levelled down.

By Mr. Cochrane:

Q. In what part of the country do you think nine-tenths of the tramway could be laid on the grass?—I refer to our own North-West Territory, where, from what I can read of the physical features of the country, it is all a rolling prairie. However, like everything else of course, it would not go over mountains, and there is no necessity why the road might not be taken around an occasional obstruction for a few miles.

By the Chairman:

Q. Have you any approximate idea of the first cost per mile of the tramways, and how would they compare in cost and repair with good macadam and plank roads?—The cost of the tramways would depend a good deal upon the locality, and other circumstances—the labour market, &c.—but from what I can gather it would range between $2,500 and $3,000 per mile. A good plank or macadam road could not, I think, be made for much less. It is hardly fair, however, to draw a comparison between the two, because one horse on a good tramway will draw ten tons, while one horse on the best common road will have enough to do with one ton. As to repairs, the circumstances are so varied that I could not at present mention any approximate sum, but it will be readily admitted that it is one of the first duties of a new county or township municipality to provide good concession roads and bridges for easy access to the market town. At the same time these roads are expensive to make, as well as to keep in repair, whether the material is close at hand or not. By adopting, therefore, in new districts about to be settled, the principle or system of locating and laying out towns and township tramways, say four miles apart, there would at least be only one road to build and keep in repair by the municipality instead of four, incurring thereby less annual taxation, besides dispensing with a good deal of horse labour for doing the work of carting.

By Mr. Watson:

Q. What would be the description of this track; would the rails be of iron, and what would the roadbed be made of?—I would use a light iron rail. For the roadbed I would use a longitudinal sleeper, and iron tie-rods to keep the road from spreading.

By Mr. Cochrane:

Q. I believe you advocate a system of steam cultivation for the North-West?—Yes; I do.

Q. And I understand you to say that it would do away with horses?—I am advocating steam cultivation without any horses.

Q. But we know that the horses that will farm your land will draw away all the grain you will produce?—A distance of thirty miles?

Q. Yes.—It will not pay to draw it thirty miles.

Q. Many of us come from sections of country where that is done. There is no use in advocating theory in this matter; in the back part of my Riding it is more than that distance from the frontier, and farmers have drawn their grain to market for years and have grown wealthy. The wealthiest township in my Riding is the Township of Seymour, and the farmers of that township have had to haul their grain a greater distance than thirty miles?—Yes; but they must have had good roads.

By the Chairman:

Q. Do you consider that the cost of keeping up these roads would be greater or less than the cost of keeping up macadamized roads?—I think it would be less than in the case of a good macadam road.

Q. We are speaking merely of repairs?—Yes; the cost of keeping up. Of course, rolling stock would be expensive.

By Mr. Cochrane:

Q. How long do you suppose an average tie, or sleeper, would last?—I propose to use a longitudinal tie. Mr. Schreiber has told me lately of a new material which is being got out for ties, which will not be so perishable as wood. It is made of paper pulp and straw, and will be almost imperishable.

By the Chairman:

Q. What is your opinion respecting the cultivation of belts of trees in the villages?—In following the plan I have explained and described, the several towns and villages, and the railway company themselves, might, if they thought fit to do so, have broad belts of trees or shrubbery planted and cultivated on each side of the street, say 25 feet wide, at the rear of the lots 200 feet, and at each side of the railway 200 feet, as a protection against snow storms, blizzards, &c., and also for the purposes mentioned and spoken of by several of the speakers at the late meeting of the American Forestry Congress, held at Montreal.

Q. Have you devised or elaborated any plan by which these tramways would come under the control of somebody who would regulate their running and prevent collisions between the parties who would require the use of them?—Yes; I have shown here that the county would borrow money, as we did for instance, at Peterborough and Port Hope, and of course the parties who would guarantee that money would appoint some one to see that the road was properly kept up.

Q. What I want to get at, is this: each of those tramways would be a separate road of itself and would require to be under separate control, as regards the fixing of the time of running of trains?—Each county would have three roads running through it.

Q. Then they would require to have a Superintendent for each of those roads?—Oh, no; they would be only four miles apart.

By Mr. Hickey:

Q. Would you have switches on the tramways?—Yes; the cars would not come in contact with each other going in opposite directions. Opposite each farm there

would be a siding, at which a man could place a car and keep it for several days, till he had it loaded with wheat or other produce. In this way he could bring fifteen tons of wheat to market at one load.

By Mr. Trow:

Q. This is an entirely new system, is it not. Has it ever been adopted in any country?—The Mennonites have adopted the village system to some extent, and also in the Province of Quebec, where the holdings are cut up into narrow strips.

By Mr. McCraney:

Q. What would you think of the idea of laying out these lines to run on every township line. In that way the roads would be six miles apart?—I have them laid out on a plan of four miles apart, but, of course, any distance might be fixed upon that would be desirable. With this system the farmer who is situated thirty or forty miles from the trunk line of railway would have to travel on an average only one mile to the tramway, and an immense amount of carting would be saved.

Q. What do you think of the idea of using horses on the tramways instead of steam?—That can be done. I would not put a heavy locomotive on such a road, but a light engine something like a dummy engine, could be used, and light passenger cars could also be placed on the road. One engine would be able to draw from ten to fifteen cars, each car carrying fifteen tons. As an instance of the saving that would be effected in this way, I may mention that I have a friend who is farming out from Brandon, and he writes me that it has cost him 20 cents a bushel to get his wheat to Brandon. Now, with a tramway you could draw wheat a distance of thirty miles at a cost of less than 5 cents per bushel.

By the Chairman:

Q. But when you bring your grain down to the village at the trunk line of railway, it may be that the railway station is ten miles distant in one direction or the other on the railway. You would then have to unload the grain at the village and draw it that distance to the station?—The railway stations on the Canadian Pacific Railway are located on an average of eight miles apart, and no point on the tramway line can be farther from the station than four miles. Besides, I have shown a tramway track running parallel with the railway line through the village to the station, and in this way the difficulty you speak of would be avoided.

The Committee adjourned.